

Till Death Do Us Part: Will Longstanding Rivalry Impede the Ethnic Coalition of ISIS and Al Qaeda?

By Bianca Pergher

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Professor Claire Griggs

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Abstract

According to Dr. Tricia Bacon's and Dr. Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault's, "Al Qaeda and the Islamic State's Break: Strategic Strife or Lackluster Leadership?," the "strategic differences between Al Qaeda and ISIS were not sufficient to cause the split," the strife that ensued between al Nusra and ISIS caused this complex alliance to rupture. Osama bin Laden's effective leadership aligned a terrorist network that amassed rebel groups for the global jihadist cause. Unlike bin Laden's elitist view to destabilize the West, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi believed the principal enemies of the jihadist movement were Shiites for their false interpretation of Islamic theology and Sunni apostates for their support of the West and corrupt Arab rulers.

In "ISIS and al-Qaeda—What Are They Thinking? Understanding the Adversary," Dr. Bernard Haykel states that the jihadi militant movements are consequential to the Sunni revivalism experienced in the brutalized Arab politics of domestically repressed states from Algeria to Iraq, with groups seeking to empower Muslims against Islam's enemies. Haykel later describes the relationship between ISIS and Al Qaeda as one of contentious competition for resources. Within this scholarly framework, the author uniquely addresses the remaining question of whether or not, and under what conditions, umbrella networks: ISIS and Al Qaeda, could attempt a merger.

To ascertain the pragmatism of a potential coalition, various alliance literature has been applied and methodized into three paradigms; with the first, assessing party coalitions and culture, the second addressing the alliance framework from a business perspective, and the third concentrating on partnerships and mergers. Moreover, the paper focuses on the aforementioned paradigms and various militant group case studies, with a lens that addresses the relational exchange between ISIS and Al Qaeda.

Introduction

At its zenith, ISIS's forces controlled a territory the size of Britain, with approximately 10 million captives. Under encampment, captives, most notably the Yazidis of Iraq and Syria, were murdered and enslaved. In 2017, the Iraqi Federal Police reclaimed the city of Mosul, a major jihadi encampment. In early February of 2019, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) vowed to dismantle the remaining caliphate. With help from the U.S.-led international coalition, numerous war planes and mortar barrages struck the stronghold (see figure 1). Now, with the last Syrian city of Baghouz under siege by the SDF, optimistic citizens may be naïve enough to assume that the war on the global jihad is over. "While some may be tempted to celebrate what is seen as ISIS's demise, the fertile soil in which ISIS grew and spread is still there."¹ With a large base of online followers, potential lone-wolf attackers, and militants working underground to conduct hit-and-run attacks and bombings in Iraq and central Syria, the fight is far from over. One question remains, will the caliphate's setback be enough to reunite long-term, rivals: ISIS and Al Qaeda?

Background: The Partnership's Initial Demise

In 1996, Osama bin Laden announced the first fatwa against the U.S. A synthesis conducted by the RAND Corporation has highlighted that a recent "switch from hard to soft targets and from mass casualty to smaller, but more frequent attacks; an increased focus on the economic impact of

¹ Wedeman, B. (2019, March 23). The ISIS caliphate has ended, but its breeding ground thrives. Retrieved March 30, 2019, from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/23/middleeast/end-of-isis-caliphate-intl/>

attacks; [and] greater efficiency in the utilization of loose networks,” has characterized Al Qaeda’s strategy.² Subsequent to the 9/11 attacks, Al Qaeda lost its secure base in Afghanistan under paid protection by the Taliban. Its senior and mid-level commanders were targeted due to increased security, creating a catch 22, whereby future planned ‘spectaculars’ would become unparalleled. As explained by Rabasa et al. in “Beyond Al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement,” Al Qaeda depends heavily on the subcontracting of militant groups as a de facto force multiplier, “a consequence of the aforementioned loss of haven and leadership—al-Qaeda has been forced to increasingly rely on other terrorist groups who are in some way connected to the network to conduct its attacks (Pg 38).”

“Not only did these acts of terrorism ensure that the group continued to be viewed as both vibrant and relevant, they also helped to underscore an image of the network as being able to strike at will around the globe (Pg 39).” Under the patronage of the Taliban, Al Qaeda was provided a safe haven to train militants, indoctrinate them, and simultaneously conduct effective attacks. However, the strategic transition from an identifiable operative core to a loose network of subcontracted militants is in part reflective of less capable assets and infrastructure (see figure 3). Al Qaeda has now reverted “to other established terrorist affiliates to conduct attacks but also to operate in a more decentralized, cellular fashion.”³ More recently, the creation of the virtual jihad and various urban training camps has allowed this network to prevail, igniting a second-generation

² Rabasa, Angel, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O'Brien, and William Rosenau, *Beyond al-Qaeda: Part 1, The Global Jihadist Movement*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006.
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG429.html>.

³ Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction [Gilmore Commission], *Fourth Annual Report to the President and the Congress, II, Reassessing the Threat*, Washington, D.C.: RAND Corporation, December 15, 2002. Pg. 12 – 13.

“wave of terrorism in Morocco, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, [and] Turkey [that]... is still able to conduct effective attacks despite the loss of training bases in Afghanistan (Pg 43).” In addition to using American and European converts for their passports and undetected access through security, Al Qaeda has diversified its resource base beyond the financial assistance it receives from states within the Gulf. Apart from receiving donations from jihad’s numerous supporters, Al Qaeda also commits online fraud and infiltrates “charities.” Prior to the U.S.’s international coalition against terrorism, Al Qaeda’s central core of senior elites would engage in years of operational planning for ‘spectacular’ attacks. In place of conducting these large-scale, complex ‘spectaculars’, strikes have become smaller and more local attempts to resuscitate the jihadi cause as part of a global franchise. Al Qaeda’s affiliates have enough endowment to “make operational decisions on their own,” employing shortened planning cycles and bombarding soft targets (Pg 60).”

There were many similarities between ISIS and Al Qaeda, as they are now both parent organizations. However, it wasn’t till drastic disagreements in strategy, approach, and recruitment, initiated their split in the wake of 2014. It was under the mature mediation of Al Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri that relations between Al Qaeda and ISIS were beneficial. Today, the two rival entities compete within the same network of donors, suppliers, and resources for the “soul” of the jihadist movement. To understand what caused this stringent divide, we must assess the fundamental differences in tactics between the parent organizations. Under Osama bin Laden’s vision, he sought to unite a network of independent, dilettante jihadist fighters with the greater goal of removing their foreign enemy, the United States, from the Middle Eastern region. Militant groups, subdued by oppressive regimes, were swept under Al Qaeda’s umbrella with a myriad of assets, weapons, expertise, training, and funding. However, the death of bin Laden would prove detrimental to the unity of this terrorist network.

At the pinnacle of the U.S.'s invasion into Iraq in 2003, bin Laden lent money to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of the initial Iraqi Islamic Caliphate, with hopes that he would join Al Qaeda's network (see figure 2). Although initially reluctant, Zarqawi fastened to bin Laden's network and formed Al Qaeda's Iraq branch or "AQI". From the initial phase of this partnership, there were immediate differences in perspectives, while Zawahiri and bin Laden focused on an anti-West agenda, Zarqawi saw more promise in fighting sectarian wars and Sunni Muslim apostates. In public, bin Laden and Zawahiri embraced this relationship but it was clear Al Qaeda had swallowed more than it could chew. This became evident when AQI's violence towards Sunnis provoked their backlash and subsequent partnership with American ground troops. Bin Laden was advised by Al Qaeda spokesman, Adam Gadahn to sever its ties with AQI, "because of the group's sectarian violence."⁴ When the Syrian civil war broke in 2011, then-AQI leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, sent fighters to Syria to establish a base organization. Although AQI's strategic move to send operations to Syria had revived their Iraqi jihadist movement, it ultimately prepared for their secession from Al Qaeda's main leadership. In charge of connecting the then-parent and child organizations, Zawahiri let AQI take the reins and build its own name in Syria. When the former- AQI sect coined the name "Jabhat al-Nusra," Zawahiri tried to correct the situation by claiming Al Qaeda's affiliation but Baghdadi refused, causing the inevitable demise of the partnership in 2014.

Almost overnight, Baghdadi's forces gained significant territory in Iraq, including strategic access to Syria, hydroelectric dams, and lucrative oil refineries. By July of 2014, Baghdadi renamed his operations as the Islamic Caliphate. Perplexed, Al Qaeda member branches were declaring their support for ISIS but Zawahiri understood that Al Qaeda would no longer take center-stage in the

⁴ Byman, Daniel L., and Jennifer R. Williams. "ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War." *Brookings.edu*, The Brookings Institution, 28 July 2016, www.brookings.edu/articles/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadisms-global-civil-war/.

global jihadist movement. Primarily, Al Qaeda believed apostate killing sprees were inconclusive to extracting the “root cause” of the Middle Eastern problem, the U.S. Al Qaeda believed that the U.S.’s continued support for corrupt regimes within the Middle East, prevented the necessary uprisings for regime change. Essentially, while Al Qaeda focused on the “far enemy,” ISIS prioritized the “near enemy,” such as the Assad regime in Syria and the Abadi regime in Iraq. Additionally, while Al Qaeda collaborates within and outside its terrorist network, the Islamic Caliphate chose to spearhead its organization and remain independent. ISIS uses amateur lone-wolf attackers, targeted by jihadist propaganda to incentivize recruitment. While ISIS consolidates power through expanding territories and coalesced armies, Al Qaeda believed a caliphate was a long-term goal, only to be initiated with popular support. Since ISIS originated its power during the civil uprisings in Iraq and Syria, it takes a militaristic approach with mass forces and artillery. Using fear-enticed displays of public beheadings, rape, and crucifixions, ISIS terrorizes populations into their compliance and conversion. Keeping in mind these distinctions, it’s clear that Baghdadi grew tired of Al Qaeda’s slow and steady pace. Moreover, the age difference between the leaders of the two organizations spans the length of twenty years. In addition to differences in tactics, approach, and strategy, ISIS utilizes Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to attract the attention of younger, distraught Muslim males. The Islamic State has become the deviant successor group that stemmed and evolved from Al Qaeda but ultimately changed its mission, utilizing brutalist militarized warfare and modern methods of recruitment. “Ideologically, the sectarianism it foments is worsening Shia-Sunni tension throughout the region. So the Islamic State is a much bigger threat to Middle Eastern stability than Al Qaeda ever was.”⁵

⁵ See previous.

Thesis: Addressing the Framework for Alliance

According to Dr. Bernard Haykel's, "ISIS and al-Qaeda—What Are They Thinking? Understanding the Adversary," the jihadi militant movements are consequential to the Sunni revivalism experienced in the brutalized Arab politics of domestically repressed states from Algeria to Iraq, with the two groups seeking "to empower Muslims against what they describe as Islam's enemies, both external and internal (Pg 71)."⁶ Unlike Osama bin Laden's abstract and elitist view to destabilize the West, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi believed the principal enemies of the jihadist movement were Shiites for their false interpretation of Islamic theology and Sunni apostates for their support of the West and corrupt Arab rulers. Haykel describes the relationship between ISIS and Al Qaeda as one of contentious competition for resources. Though the two groups initially split through differences in approach and "despite some ideological and operational differences, both Al Qaeda and ISIS tap into a deep vein of resentment, disillusionment, and disenfranchisement, specifically among the Sunni Arabs (Pg 72)." Haykel laments that Al Qaeda's more elitist view on jihadism's radical crusade over the West, was less relevant to Zarqawi's Sunni followers, who were mobilized on the ground. Overtime, Al Qaeda's lack of reoccurring 'spectacular' threats dimmed its extensive vision, making it "less appealing over time - the attacks of 9/11 were in a sense AQ's Achilles' heel since they could not be surpassed (Pg 76)."

To better understand whether or not ISIS and Al Qaeda will likely re-unite, various alliance literature has been applied and assessed into three paradigms; with the first, assessing party coalitions and culture, the second addressing the alliance framework from a business perspective,

⁶ Haykel, B. (2016). ISIS and al-Qaeda—What Are They Thinking? Understanding the Adversary. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 668(1), 71–81.

and the third, concentrating on partnerships and mergers. According to the party coalitions and culture literature, ethnic groups are more likely to coalesce when they have shared cultural history while the business alliance framework suggests that mergers are formed through delicate cultivation of synergy and pragmatic power-sharing. Moreover, the partnership and merger criteria claims that alliances are formed when groups converge on the basis of ideology. With this understanding in mind, the paper assesses the various paradigms and case studies of militant groups with a lens that addresses the relational exchange between ISIS and Al Qaeda.

Consulted Literature

Party Coalitions and Culture

In Okamoto's article, "Organizing across Ethnic Boundaries in the Post-Civil Rights Era: Asian American Panethnic Coalitions," she discusses the creation of a pan-ethnic Asian American Alliance due to initial insensitive threats to Chinese Americans. Overtime, these remarks were marketed as a threat to all Asians, allowing for the larger goal of collective movement activity. This shared alliance was first used to combat the high-levels of imposing anti-Asian violence and sentiment. Eventually, the shared cultural history was utilized to broaden pan-ethnic Asian issues, forming a cross-ethnic coalition. "Cross-ethnic coalition events demonstrate that organizations with different interests, goals, and histories can effectively coordinate their efforts for a common cause (Pg 143)."⁷

⁷ Okamoto, D. (2010). Organizing across Ethnic Boundaries in the Post-Civil Rights Era: Asian American Panethnic Coalitions. In Van Dyke N. & McCammon H. (Eds.), *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements* (pp. 143-169). University of Minnesota Press.

Okamoto outlines the various conditions that encourage groups to form organizational alliances across ethnic boundaries. The conditions include: broadening social forces, sharing racial ideology, influential leaders molding group interests, powerful counter-movements with restrictive legislation, and threats to these organizational movements. Additionally, Okamoto explains the “Resource Hypothesis and Competition Theory,” whereby a coalition will form only under noncompetitive conditions when resources are plentiful. “When racial groups are in competition for scarce resources, racial boundaries are heightened, and coalitions, between different Asian ethnic groups should be more likely (Pg 150).” To test this hypothesis, Okamoto uses a data set of 393 collective action events involving Asian-Americans in thirty metropolitan areas from 1970 to 1998. The author defines a cross-ethnic coalition as a “coordination of efforts between two or more organizations that serve different ethnic populations in the Asian American community (Pg 151).”

In relaying Okamoto’s research to this paper’s aforementioned thesis, her “Resource Hypothesis and Competition Theory” are instrumental in setting the groundwork for Al Qaeda and ISIS’s alliance and competition framework. According to Okamoto, coalition-building occurs when resources are plentiful in competitive conditions. If this is correct, ISIS’s current setbacks and loss of its caliphate could level the ‘playing field’ for a coalitional occurrence between the two rival organizations.

Business Alliances

According to Wiklund’s and Shepherd’s article, entitled, “The Effectiveness of Alliances and Acquisitions: The Role of Resource Combination Activities,” the potential value of an alliance or acquisition that combines resources “depends on the ability of the firm to discover and conduct

productive resource combinations (Pg 193).”⁸ The authors list examples wherein, the alliance or acquisition was short-lived or less profitable than first assumed. One such example includes the strategic alliance between Apple and IBM in 1992 to create a joint operating system, called Taligent. Despite intentions of success, the alliance dissolved after failed attempts to merge. “Examples of alliances and acquisitions that fail to deliver on the intended synergies are mounting, yet they are vigorously pursued by companies around the globe (Denrell, Fang, & Winter, 2003).”⁹ Not only do firms differ in their resource portfolios but they vary in their ability to achieve the synergistic benefits of bundling resources. “The value creating potential of the resource portfolio increases when the resources acquired are complementary to the existing ones—the joint use of existing and acquired resources can yield a higher total value than the use of each set of resources independently (Sirmon, Hitt & Ireland, 2007).”¹⁰ Therefore, achieving synergy takes more than complementary resources, it requires a realized valuation and full exploitation of the resource. A streamlined focus on value creation is an incomplete understanding of the complementary resource’s potential performance. For their study, the authors focused on the integration of resource bundling “to realize the potential value of the complementarities (Pg 194).” As explained, “...productive performance outcomes [depend] on the extent to which management engages in activities that [bundle] them together within the firm’s resource portfolios (Pg 194).”

⁸ Wiklund, J., & Shepherd, D. (2009). The Effectiveness of Alliances and Acquisitions: The Role of Resource Combination Activities. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 33(1), 193–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2008.00286.x>

⁹ Denrell, J., Fang, C., & Winter, S.G. (2003). The economics of strategic opportunity. *Strategic Management Journal*, 24, 977–990.

¹⁰ Sirmon, D.G., Hitt, M.A., & Ireland, R.D. (2007). Managing firm resources in dynamic environments to create value: Looking inside the black box. *Academy of Management Review*, 273–292.

Wiklund and Shepherd arrived at three hypotheses, whereby one demonstrates comparable application to the expounding research on terrorist network alliances. According to the authors, “The more an international firm conducts resource combination activities, the more positive the relationship between (a) engaging in international alliances and performance, and (b) engaging in international acquisitions and performance (Pg 198).” To test their hypotheses, the authors investigated 319 small firms and assessed their resource combination activities to ascertain the effectiveness of the alliances and acquisitions. In applying this theory to terrorist network research, Al Qaeda and ISIS are both international organizations, having multiple franchises in different areas throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Maghreb. The effectiveness of their umbrella networks should be assessed based on how well they incorporate resource endowments and moderate their branch activities.

In the “Five Principles to Business Alliances,” Hughes and Weiss outline five key aspects to keep in mind when aligning and merging business organizations. Their first point emphasizes defining the desired relationship, “focus less on defining the business plan and more on how you’ll work together.”¹¹ This includes a detailed business plan and contract, deciding how the two organizations will interact, to better clarify the nature of the partners’ working relationship. In terms of collaboration, firms must know how their counterparts operate, including its organizational structure, policies and procedures, and cultural norms to later ensure mutual trust and respect. The second point explains that firms should “develop metrics pegged not only to alliance goals but also to alliance progress.” Frameworks for alliances should include shared goals such as, increased revenue, reduced costs, gains in market share, and the like. Alliance performances should also be

¹¹ Hughes, Jonathan, and Jeff Weiss. “Simple Rules for Making Alliances Work.” *Joint Ventures*, Harvard Business Review, 1 Aug. 2014, hbr.org/2007/11/simple-rules-for-making-alliances-work.

measured in terms of “ends” and “means.” The “ends” measurement indicates financial value while the “means” measurement includes information sharing, speed of decision making, and the development of new ideas. It is also essential to highlight the differing expectations and qualitative measures of alliance progress in monthly audits. Without measuring these pay-offs, resources such as time, effort, and investment may be better deployed elsewhere.

The author’s third point suggests that, “instead of trying to eliminate differences, [firms should] leverage them to create value.” According to Hughes and Weiss, it takes two months to forget the initial organizational culture of a business practice. “Companies ally because they have key differences they want to leverage—different markets, customers, know-how, processes, and cultures.” By minimizing the conflict of highlighting differences, companies can focus on reaching agreements. Oftentimes conflict “arises from deep discomfort with differences and assumptions that the same management strategies would work with external partners.” Firms should utilize these unique competencies to “leverage complementary strengths and assets.” The authors also explain that firms can sometimes be indecisive “bureaucratic dinosaurs,” upsetting more “nimble” operational types. Although these behavioral differences can become incompetent and untrustworthy, once these firms acknowledge their areas of strength and weakness, they can effectively respect their differences in a power-sharing structure. Moreover, firms should “go beyond formal governance structures to encourage collaborative behavior.” By nurturing and fostering collaborative behavior throughout the chain of command, firms can promote equal accountability, whereby the firms “develop dispassionate analysis of how both parties contributed to problems that arise in the interdependent relationship.”

Lastly, the authors explain that “companies are not monolithic, yet alliance advice tends to gloss over this basic reality and treat partners as if they were simple, homogeneous entities.” The largest barriers to effective alliances include, “mixed messages, broken commitments, and

unpredictable, inconsistent behavior from different segments of a partner organization.” Firms should devote time to understanding their counterpart’s business culture and “defining the rules of engagement for guided interactions.” Additionally, firms must ensure that different branches don’t have varying levels of willingness to invest and cooperate with the counterpart. In an example, the authors discovered that most executives negotiate firm alliances but “true buy-in from other parts of the enterprise had never been secured.”

In referencing, “Five Principles to Business Alliances,” it is important to keep in mind, that both ISIS and Al Qaeda have different bureaucratic structures, which initially ignited their split. While Al Qaeda is more of a “bureaucratic dinosaur,” calculably planning and weighing the pros and cons of ‘spectaculars,’ ISIS appears to be nimbler with its usage of ‘lone-wolf’ attackers. This represents a difference in strategy that would have to be considered in terms of creating a power-sharing structure.

Partnerships and Mergers

In “Approaching Merger: The Converging Public Policy Agendas of the AFL and CIO, 1938–1955,” Cornfield and McCammon assess the eventual merging of the AFL and CIO despite initial apprehension on both sides. The Labor federation was known for promoting its broad public policy agenda on social welfare, labor law, employment policy, international trade, public education and other public policies in federal and state legislatures. Both federations subscribed to these public policy objectives before the merger, as evidenced in the wide-ranging resolution introduced at their conventions. “Thus, the merger was expected to concentrate, rather than to disperse, efforts in support of favorable legislation (Bloch 1956).”¹² The authors argue that the

¹² Bloch, Joseph. 1956. “Founding Convention of the AFL-CIO.” *Monthly Labor Review* 79: 147–48

combined working unity of the groups was achieved due to the initial “ideological congruence between movement organizations (Maney 2000).”¹³ Moreover, “for coordinated action to occur, groups must have a certain degree of overlapping interests, goals, and core beliefs (Pg 80).”¹⁴

As Steven Barkan explains in his 1986 Civil Rights Movement study, “groups with pronounced disagreements over policy goals will rarely come together and work jointly to achieve social change.”¹⁵ Interestingly enough, before the eventual merging of the AFL and CIO, the two parties had incomparable differences in organizational structure that led to unsuccessful partnership efforts. “In the years before the 1950s, conflicts between the AFL and CIO over organizational philosophy, union jurisdictions, membership recruitment, and public policy goals, as well as personality conflicts among labor leaders, led to several abortive merger efforts (Seidman 1956).”¹⁶ By studying the agenda from organizational conferences, Cornfield and McCammon found that, “...a shift in the ideological orientation of one of the groups that entailed a broadening in the AFL’s policy agenda and its widening embrace of the emerging New Deal welfare state set the stage for organizational merger (Pg 81).” In layman’s terms, the AFL widened its policy agenda to pave a path for the CIO’s shift in ideological orientation. Moreover, the authors discovered that prior to

¹³ Maney, Gregory M. 2000. “Transnational Mobilization and Civil Rights in Northern Ireland.” *Social Problems* 47: 153–179.

¹⁴ Cornfield, D. (2010). Approaching Merger: The Converging Public Policy Agendas of the AFL and CIO, 1938–1955. In McCammon H. & Van Dyke N. (Eds.), *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements* (pp. 79-98). University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttttdjf.8>

¹⁵ Barkan, Steven E. 1986. “Interorganizational Conflict in the Southern Civil Rights Movement.” *Sociological Inquiry* 56:190-209.

¹⁶ Seidman, Joel. 1956. “Efforts toward Merger, 1935–1955.” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 9: 353–70.

the merger, the AFL had been increasingly criticized for its lack of aggressive organizing and less inclusive model, in comparison to the CIO's "industrial unionism, in which all production workers of a single industry, regardless of occupation and skill level, belonged to one union (Pg 81)." It appears that years of insurgency within the AFL's structure led to the eventual merging of the separate groups in 1955. During the period of tension that lasted from 1938 to 1955, the legislative goals of both the AFL and CIO had increasingly coincided. Overall, "the growing convergence in the public policy goals of the two federations resulted mainly from a broadening of the range of public policy domains of interest to the AFL (Pg 87)."

In assessing this source for its application to the terrorist alliance framework, there exists a connection between organizational structures, combined working unity, and ideological congruence, to determine the merging of ISIS and Al Qaeda. When comparing ISIS to Al Qaeda, it appears that one may have to relinquish its bureaucratic structure and less nimble approach to provide for acquisition of the other unless coinciding goals are identified.

Militant Group Case Studies

The HuJI & HuM Militant Groups

According to Dr. Haykel, despite the recent loss of territory, "reuniting would mean that IS members have to give up on the idea of the caliphate." However, after consulting various case studies, it appears that militant groups capriciously end and mend their relationships, proposing a deviation from the pragmatism suggested by the business alliance literature. Upon completing a case study for the HuJI and HuM militant groups of Pakistan, Khurshchev Singh's article, "HuJI in India: An Assessment," explained that the mujahideen forces were "created by the United States

and Pakistan to fight against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan during 1979–1989 (Pg 182).¹⁷ In 1985, the Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami or HuJI splintered into two groups, the HuJI and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), led by Fazlur Rehman Khalil. After Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the HuM's predominant focus was on annexation of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) regions, aligning with the radical Deobandi teachings of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, which advocates for a strong pan-Islamic ideology in India.¹⁸ In 1993, Pakistani General, Pervez Musharraf helped to unite HuM and HuJI, forming the Harkat-ul-Ansar or HuA. “While HuM was fully involved in terrorist attacks in J&K, the HuJI was not that active,” causing their eventual split again, in 1997.¹⁹ Additionally, multiple subgroups were formed as different networks and recruits were identified in various areas across Southeast Asia. By 1992, “HuJI-B” or the Bangladeshi subgroup was supported by the efforts of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Al Qaeda under the leadership of Osama bin Laden. Subsequent to Farooq Kashmiri assuming leadership of the HuM in February of 2000, former members established an off-shoot group, Jaish-e-Muhammad, led by Maulana Masood Azhar (see figure 4). According to Peter Chalk, an expert on terrorism at the RAND Corporation, “although these groups remain organizationally distinct and exhibit subtle ideological and theological differences, they are characterized by an overlapping membership that variously reflects personal

¹⁷ Khurshchev Singh, T. (2009). HuJI in India: An Assessment. *Strategic Analysis*, 33(2), 182–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160802518510>

¹⁸ “Backgrounder: Harkat-ul-Mujahideen,” Institute for Conflict Management, <http://www.Seagreen/maind/Web/India/J&K/TerroristOutfits.htm> (as of March 2019); U.S. Department of State (2002b), pp. 93–94.

¹⁹ Khurshchev Singh, T. (2008, February 13). HuJI after the Death of its India Chief. Retrieved February 18, 2019, from https://idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/HuJIaftertheDeathofitsIndiaChief_TKSingh_130208

ties, a common anti-Indian agenda, and shared experiences in overseas militant training camps.”²⁰ In addition to being offshoots, various external groups, including the “LeT, JeM, and HuM – have been directly linked to bin Laden’s transnational terror network.”²¹

In terms of goals and operations, Khurshchev Singh explains that because the group has various subunits in different countries, multiple objectives and activities have been identified. Although the HuJI was initially created to serve Afghan mujahideen camps during the Soviet-Afghan War; today, their general mission is to provide defense for Muslims, spread destabilizing terrorism, and wage jihad in captured territories with the hopes of establishing Islamic rule. While their various outfits differ in operation within their respective locations, HuJI –Pakistan, HuJI-Bangladesh and India, don’t appear to clash in their general objectives, as they are operating from separate locations. Moreover, although the various subgroups have well-developed networks and donors, they do not look to outbid each other. This is unlike the competitive behavior of the ISIS-Al Qaeda relationship, which has been witnessed within the scholarly community and previously mentioned by Dr. Haykel.

Simón Bolívar’s CGSB and Member Guerrilla Groups: FARC, ELN, and EPL

The Armed Forces of the Columbian Revolution or FARC originally formed in 1966 as a communist consolidation of proletariat defense militia, who’s groups dated back to the prior decade. FARC-dominated territory became known as an “independent republic,” under President

²⁰ Chalk, Peter, and Chris Fair, “Laskar-e-Taiba: At the Vanguard of the Kashmiri Insurgency,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, November 2002.

²¹ Rabasa, Angel, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O'Brien, and William Rosenau, *Beyond al-Qaeda: Part 1, The Global Jihadist Movement*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006.
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG429.html>.

Guillermo León Valencia, who coined the term “Tirofijo,” to describe the rogue state that was predominantly “neglected by the national government and plagued by general lawlessness.”²² During La Violencia, the Colombian Civil War that waged between the conservative and liberal parties between 1948 and 1958, the FARC strengthened its ties with the Marxist-led Communist Party based on its disillusionment with the liberal party. Due to the deliquesce of the Soviet Union, the FARC received a major truncation in its financing. Moreover, its reliance on Marxism provoked a rather anachronistic reputation. Therefore, the FARC began to rely heavily on the guerrilla warfare tactics of kidnapping for ransom, receiving protection rents for illegal drug development, and extorting businesses. As Harvey F. Kline explains in “Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana,” this strategy merely funded the militant group’s efforts and expansion; however, it “did not win them new sympathizers (Pg 11).”

The promotion of FARC’s Marxist ideology lost touch with public support as the U.S. government increased its sponsorship of the Colombian military, however, this did not damper it’s enlargement of territory and recruitment. FARC began attacking soft targets, “engaging in actions that harmed civilians, such as land mines and the notoriously inaccurate gas-cylinder bombs, hijacking commercial jets, assassinating elected officials, murdering peace activists, and attacking an upscale family recreation center in the heart of Bogotá.” Moreover, at its zenith, FARC drew in a profit of approximately \$600 million from its illegal drug trade, kidnappings, and extortion schemes.²³

²² Turner, K. (2008). Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana - by Harvey F. Kline. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 27(4), 591–592. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-9856.2008.00286_11.x

²³ The Guerrilla Groups in Colombia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 21, 2019, from <https://www.unric.org/en/colombia/27013-the-guerrilla-groups-in-colombia>

When the Army of National Liberation or ELN was officially formed in 1964 by a group of left-wing radical Catholic students, they were inspired by Marxist ideology and the Cuban Revolution. The ELN included a democratic approach to structure, instituting operational meetings to elect position-holders. Initially ELN refrained from interfering with the drug trade but after witnessing its lucrative value, the ELN began engaging in kidnappings and the pilfering of oil pipelines. “Some of the group asked for and obtained military training and began a series of discussions about a *foco* (focus) strategy for Colombia.”²⁴ Moreover, the ELN focused on targeting the coal and oil sector through its kidnapping and extortion stratagem. In the 1990’s, ELN suffered from a loss in territory due to increased governmental security. Additionally, U.S. interference in the Colombian military and investment of its energy sector impacted the ELN’s funding and recruitment.

The Ejército popular de Liberación (EPL, Popular Liberation Army) was established in 1967 as an armed and Mao-influenced subsect of the Colombian Communist Party. Akin to the ELN, the EPL also operated out of Santander, “an area of the country traditionally affected by disputes over land between landless campesinos and large landowners,” rendering it vulnerable to extortion.²⁵ By the 1970’s the EPL utilized kidnapping and extortion efforts to finance its militant endeavors. Within the same decade, the M-19 was formed by recusants dismissed by the Communist Party and the FARC. Although the M-19 was initially considered a subsidiary urban guerrilla group, its kidnapping and murder of the national labor federation’s leader in 1976 established its claim to fame. By 1990 both the EPL and M-19 entered into peace talks with the Colombian government, allowing for demobilization and disarmament. As a result of this

²⁴ Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana*, 19.

²⁵ see previous.

agreement, the former guerrilla groups became legal political parties. The M-19 became the Alianza Democrática M-19 and the EPL became Esperanza, Paz y Libertad, although a minority of its members maintained militancy.

Under President Belisario Betancur in 1984, a Peace Commission was formed to address the guerrilla group activity. According to Kline, Betancur believed involvement in guerrilla groups was “the product of objective circumstances of poverty, injustice, and the lack of opportunities for political participation (Pg 17).” Although Betancur reached an agreement between the FARC and EPL, the ELN had not signed the peace treaty.²⁶ The next year, in 1985, “the peace was punctuated by breaches of the ceasefire committed by both sides.”²⁷ In 1987, subsequent attempts by the government under then-President Barco had failed to reach an agreement that would result in the disarming and dissolving of the militant groups. Under President César Gaviria, the FARC, ELN, and EPL “entered a coalition through a *Coordinadora guerrillera Simón Bolívar* (CGSB, Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinator) in 1987.”²⁸ The CGSB banded together within the same Communist agenda, operating within Colombia to attack lucrative oil rigs.”²⁹ The coalition mainly formed based off akin doctrine and the collective objective of expanding monetarized and militarized support. Moreover, the groups stem from the same recruitment of the rural poor to combat

²⁶ Ana María Bejarano, “Estrategias de paz y apertura democrática: Un balance de las administraciones Betancur y Barco,” in Francisco Leal Buitrago and León Zamosc (eds.), *Al filo del caos: crisis política en la Colombia de los años 80* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1990), Pg. 66.

²⁷ Cassman, D. (n.d.). Popular Liberation Army. Retrieved March 21, 2019, from <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/119?highlight=FARC#note54>

²⁸ Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana*, 19.

²⁹ see note 23.

Colombia's wealthy class and oppose U.S. influence. It's important to keep in mind that the FARC, ELN, and EPL formed relatively around the same time period of the 1960's with a fundamental Communist agenda. While the ELN was more politically motivated and ideologically focused due to its founding by Catholic students, the FARC initially took a more militant and guerrilla warfare based approach. Although the FARC is considered less unified, it does incorporate a central command despite having various factions due to the different operating areas.³⁰

In a similar fashion to Al Qaeda's more recent subcontracting of rebel groups in homage to the jihadist global mission, the FARC, EPL, and ELN relied on recycling their militant recruits. The CGSB was an effort to consolidate the various groups under one potential power-structure. Had it not been for U.S. sponsorship of the Colombian military and the repeated governmental efforts for peace treaties, the CGSB would've likely have remained. However, while the global jihad expands over countries from Afghanistan to India, the militant groups aligned within the CGSB only operate in one country. However, these militant groups do form their own de facto states within conquered territories, acting as separate entities within Colombia.

Expositions

Through continued communications with Defense Program Director for South Asia at the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), Mr. Sayyar, provided his perspective on the paper's research question. In his response he agreed with Dr. Haykel that ISIS and Al Qaeda engage in continuous outbidding with each other for resources, making themselves more attractive to

³⁰ Kline, Harvey F. *Colombia: Democracy Under Assault*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995. *State Building and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, 1986 – 1994*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999.

potential donors and recruits. The groups compete to gain maximum exposure and funding. Mr. Sayyar believes reuniting won't likely be an option unless ISIS was immensely desperate. He claims that although the physical caliphate is in the process of its eradication, the mental and more virtual platform is one that's still very much present. Upon acknowledging the aforementioned business alliance literature, Mr. Sayyar argued that "mergers tend to happen when survival is more important than growth and for ISIS, it's not there yet." Therefore, the research findings now beg the question: has ISIS been defeated enough to concede and join forces with Al Qaeda, similar to the amalgamation between the AFL and CIO?

Through careful inspection of the literature, it appears that the business alliance framework relevantly compares the intertwining networks and motivations of terrorist organizations. The contention lies within the party coalition literature, which suggests that groups of similar cultural background would be most compatible for a potential merger. Although ISIS and Al Qaeda are predominantly Sunni organizations, they've previously targeted operatives on both sides, potentially damaging the grounds for a working relationship. In accordance with the partnership and merger literature, organizations with converging ideologies are more likely to coalesce; however, ISIS and Al Qaeda still differ in their goals, operations, and approach. While ISIS prefers brutally terrorizing civilians to amass territory for an Islamic caliphate, Al Qaeda prefers to play the waiting-game by reserving eventual governance and geopolitical domination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while Al Qaeda utilizes its calculable operational planning cycle to effectively engage in offensive attacks, ISIS prefers on-ground, brutal warfare tactics to amass

territories. This diverging operational structure, paired with a failure to coincide ideological goals, maintains that the two terrorist organizations will not likely unite. In the example of the HuJI offshoots from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, these groups do not compete as they are operating and recruiting from separate locations. In a similar fashion, the FARC and ELN did not compete despite their fundamental communist agenda because they recruited members from different socio-economic classes. While the FARC recruited distressed campesinos from the rural parts of Colombia, the ELN focused on urban, educated dwellers. Moreover, the CGSB was able to converge these akin doctrines under a centralized power-structure due to this initial lack of competition. With these findings, ISIS and Al Qaeda have not converged or concentrated their ideological goals to prepare for merger. They continue to outbid each other for resources, funding, and sponsors, provided by supporters of the jihadist global movement within the Gulf states. Furthermore, their continued rivalry in recruitment of militants, suggests that assets and infrastructure within the terrorist network are dwindling due to an increased crackdown on jihadi franchises.

Relevant Figures

Figure 1.

The Islamic Caliphate

Courtesy of CNN

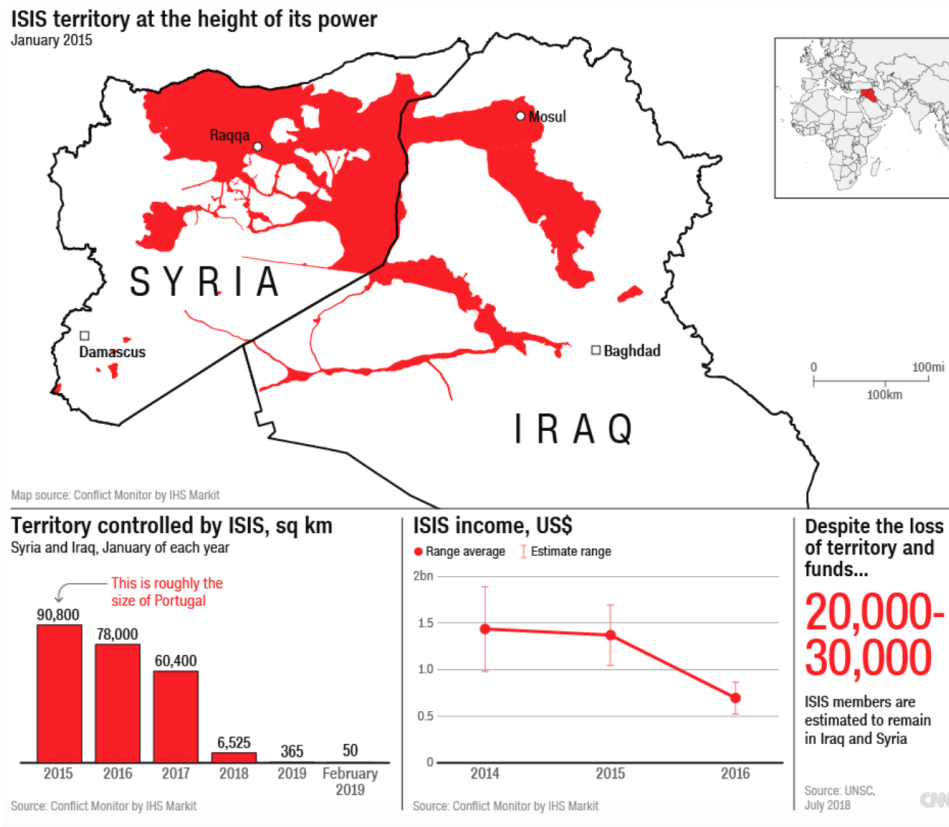


Figure 2.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (left) and Osama bin Laden (right)

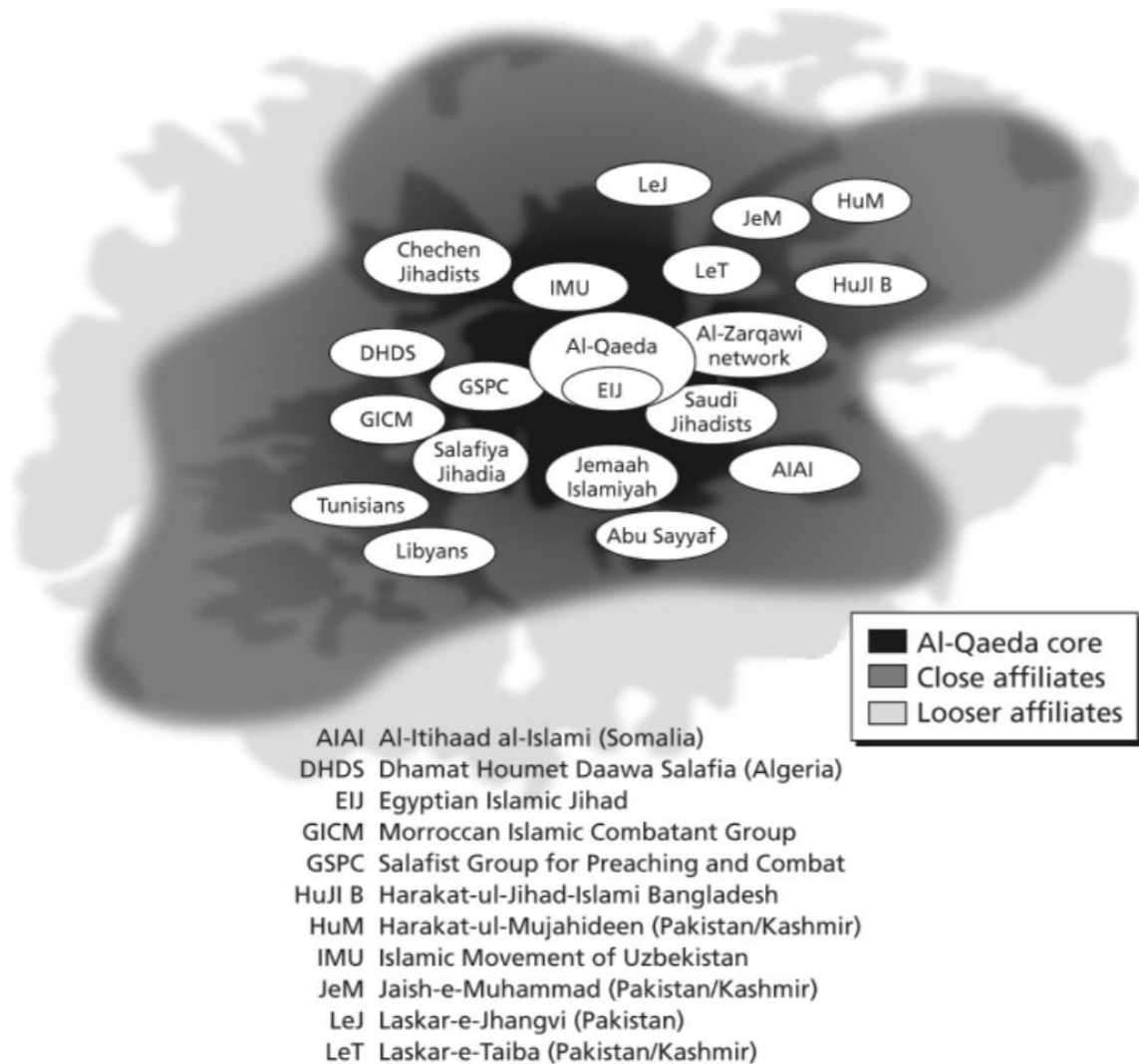
Courtesy of BBC



Figure 3.

Al Qaeda's Network of affiliates and subcontractors
Courtesy of RAND

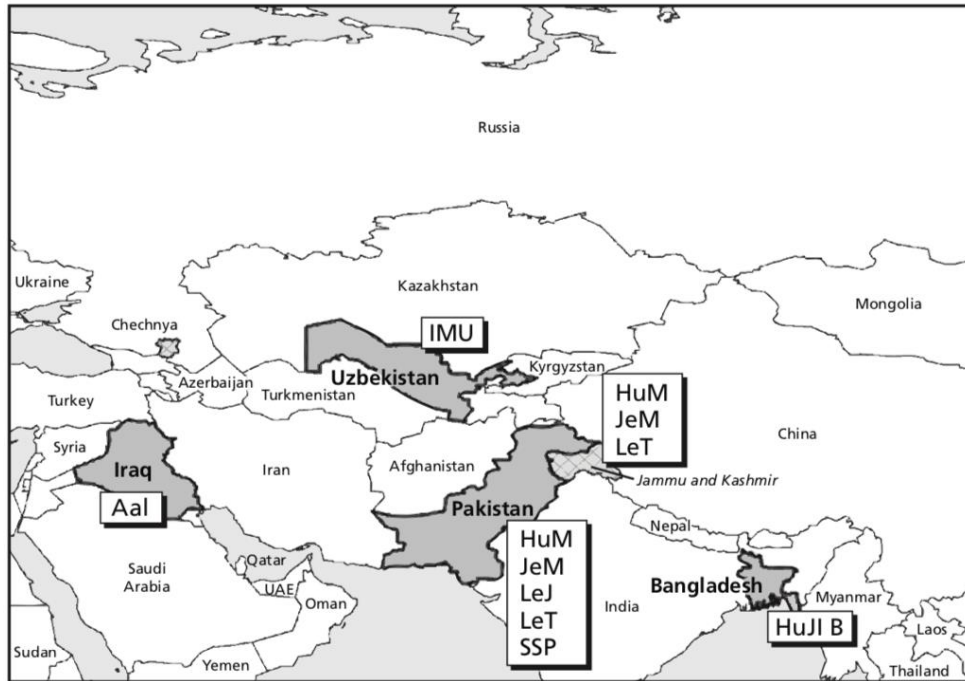
The Terrorist Nebula and Regional Clusters



RAND MG429-6.1

Figure 4.
Al Qaeda's South and Central Asian Clusters
Courtesy of RAND

South and Central Asian Clusters



NOTE: See the Abbreviations for full names of groups.

RAND MG429-7.1

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